



POLICY PAPER

NATO'S SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

THE ALLIANCE NEEDS A STRATEGY FOR THE REGIONS TO ITS SOUTH

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FEBRUARY 2021

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RAHVUSVAHELINE KAITSEUURINGUTE KESKUS
INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR DEFENCE AND SECURITY
EESTI • ESTONIA

Title: NATO's Southern Neighbourhood: The Alliance Needs a Strategy for the Regions to its South
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Publication date: February 2021
Category: Policy Paper

Cover page photo: Migrants on a rubber boat gesture as they are rescued by the SOS Mediterranee organisation during a search and rescue (SAR) operation with the MV Aquarius rescue ship (not pictured) in the Mediterranean Sea, off the Libyan Coast, September 14, 2017. REUTERS/Tony Gentile/Scanpix

Keywords: NATO adaptation, Mediterranean security, Middle East and North Africa, the Sahel

Disclaimer: Other than those attributed to the officials and experts in Spain, Italy, Greece, Romania and Turkey who agreed to be interviewed, the views and opinions contained in this policy paper are those of its author only and do not necessarily represent the positions of the International Centre for Defence and Security or any other organisation.

ISSN 2228-2068

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to extend his gratitude to government officials, experts and academics from NATO member states in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions (Greece, Italy, Romania, Spain and Turkey) with whom he conducted interviews by phone or using Internet tools. This policy paper would not have been possible without their contributions.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EUNAVFOR Med <i>Irin</i>	European Union Naval Force Mediterranean Operation <i>Irin</i>
EUTM	European Union Training Mission (Mali)
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MD	Mediterranean Dialogue
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
NRF	NATO Response Force
SNMCMG2	Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group 2
SNMG2	Standing NATO Maritime Group 2

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To its south and southeast (the Mediterranean basin, and the Middle East and North African, and Sahel countries) NATO faces multiple external threats associated with terrorism, migration, the potential spill over of instability and conflict, and the growing presence of Russia and, to a lesser extent, China. While NATO is not the lead organisation to address many of these threats, it has a possible role to play in mitigating all of them. But differing views among the Allies as to what they and NATO should do have also produced internal challenges for the Alliance.

Europe's southern rim has been seriously challenged by destabilisation in MENA since the outbreak of the Arab Spring in December 2010. War-torn Syria and Libya are sources and avenues for the spread of terrorism and mass migration, and different perceptions among the Allies about how to deal with these conflicts have led to intra-Alliance tensions, particularly between Turkey and France. The challenges and threats from the south are, in fact, far more complicated in nature than the threat from the east.

Allies in the Mediterranean region rightly expect NATO to take threats and challenges from the south as seriously as they do those from the east. NATO needs to work out and to implement a comprehensive strategy and plans for the south that include concrete aims, joint actions, and resources. Alliance cohesion and solidarity depends to a substantial extent on the ability of the Allies to do this. The north-eastern flank Allies are ready to play their part, but it is the Mediterranean Allies who have the understanding and expertise necessary to define the content of a strategy for the regions they border.

NATO should:

- Step up efforts, in the context of the probable drafting of a new Strategic Concept in 2021, to define – and resource – a clear, comprehensive, and coherent strategy for addressing threats and challenges from its southern rim. The southern Allies should take a prominent role in this process. Such a strategy should aim to, at least:
 - Enhance situational awareness in the Mediterranean region, including by defining better the role of and providing appropriate resources for the Hub for the South.
 - Continue to provide sufficient Allied military presence in the region to ensure freedom of movement, sustain deterrence and permit rapid crisis response. It is essential that the US should be included in this presence.
 - Enhance practical activities conducted in the framework of the Mediterranean Dialogue and use all NATO's available resources (including the expertise of its centres of excellence) to provide meaningful support to MENA and G5 Sahel countries in areas such as defence capacity building, resilience building, counterterrorism and counterinsurgency training, intelligence sharing, border control, cyber security, and civil protection.
- Improve coordination with other agencies active in MENA and Sahel, such as the EU, UN and African Union, in order to ensure a coherent international approach. This should include both political engagement and routine joint activities.
- Engage more the countries in the Sahel, including through the Mediterranean Dialogue, and offer practical support to international efforts in the region. The significance of the Sahel to security in MENA should not be underestimated, but rather reflected in NATO's southern approach.
- Enhance mechanisms and habits of internal political consultation with a view to avoiding disputes between Allies on Mediterranean region issues; and continue to support, and as necessary expand, its bilateral military de-confliction mechanism to resolve current disputes.

Moreover, the north-eastern flank Allies should:

- Emphasise their support for NATO's 360-degree approach, and for NATO's role in addressing threats and challenges from the south.
- Provide appropriate contributions, including military forces, to NATO and Western activities in the MENA and Sahel regions.
- Do more to ensure that their present levels of contribution are visible to other Allies.

INTRODUCTION

NATO first referred to a 360-degree approach in a 2015 statement by defence ministers (“NATO continues to provide a 360 degree approach to deter threats and, if necessary, defend Allies against any adversary”).¹ As the statement itself indicates, however, the idea that NATO should be ready to respond to threats from all directions was already well-established. At the Wales Summit several months earlier, for example, NATO leaders had agreed a Readiness Action Plan as a response both to the challenges posed by Russia – i.e., to the east – and “to the risks and threats emanating from our southern neighbourhood, the Middle East and North Africa.”²

Europe’s southern rim has been seriously challenged by destabilisation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) since the outbreak of the Arab Spring in December 2010. War-torn Syria and Libya are sources and avenues for the spread of terrorism and mass migration, and different perceptions among the Allies about how to deal with these conflicts have led to intra-Alliance tensions, particularly between Turkey and France. The challenges and threats from the south are, in fact, far more complicated in nature than the threat from the east and southeast. At the same time, while NATO can apply decades of experience in its core business of collective defence and deterrence to dealing with at least the military threat from Russia, it is far less obvious how it should approach the multidimensional threat from the south.

NATO has developed a dialogue framework and initiated some discrete practical activities, but has yet to work out a clear, coherent, and comprehensive strategy that would spell out its role in countering southern challenges and threats. The 2020 report of the reflection group appointed by the Secretary General, which will be a key input to the likely drafting of a new NATO Strategic Concept, noted that the south will most probably become more important to NATO and urged the development of such an approach to address “both the traditional threats emanating from this region like terrorism, and new risks, including the growing presence of Russia, and to a lesser extent China.”³

This policy paper presents proposals intended to reinforce Allied solidarity and ensure collective action against the threats and challenges that emanate from the regions to the south of NATO territory. Chapter 1 outlines the security environment to NATO’s south. Chapter 2 describes Allied and NATO presence and activities on the Alliance’s southern rim. Chapter 3 briefly describes the role of Russia and China in the region. Chapter 4, based on a series of interviews with officials and experts, examines the security priorities of southern Allies to identify possible components of a NATO strategy for the region.⁴ The final chapter draws conclusions and offers policy recommendations.

1. THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT TO NATO’S SOUTH

1.1. THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

The so-called Arab Spring, a series of protests and armed rebellions that started in Tunisia in December 2010, spread quickly throughout MENA, and reached as far as the Arabian Peninsula, shook the Arab world. Despite prolonged mass demonstrations demanding

¹ NATO, “[Statement by NATO Defence Ministers](#),” press release (2015) 094, 25 June 2015, para 2.

² NATO, “[Wales Summit Declaration. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales](#),” press release (2014), 5 September 2014, para 5.

³ NATO, “[NATO 2030. United for a New Era. Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General](#),” 25 November 2020, 34.

⁴ For the purposes of this paper, the southern Allies are Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania.

new constitutions, civil rights, and an end to rampant corruption, the monarchies of Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain survived. The fate of the presidential regimes in Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Libya (where, until 2011, the head of state was called the 'Brotherly Leader and Guide of the Revolution') was rather different and far more violent. Egypt has been stable under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi since June 2014, but civil – or more precisely proxy – wars continue in Syria, Libya, and Yemen.

Despite expectations in the Western world, the Arab Spring did not produce developments that would indicate prospects for democratisation in the longer term

Syria's Bashar Al-Assad, protected by the Russian military and the Wagner Group since September 2015 with the support of Iran and Iran's proxy Hezbollah, is the only pre-Arab Spring president in the region to remain in power. Libya's former leader Muammar Gaddafi (in office from September 1969 to October 2011) was lynched by a mob, Egypt's former head of state Hosni Mubarak (October 1981 to February 2011) was imprisoned for six years and died in a military hospital, while Yemen's president Ali Abdullah Saleh (May 1990 to February 2012) was killed by a Houthi rebel sniper in 2017. In Algeria, president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who had ruled since 1999, resigned in April 2019 after months of mass protests, but the corrupt and autocratic regime that he created is largely intact and run by a group of businessmen, politicians, and military leaders.⁵

Despite expectations in the Western world, the Arab Spring did not produce developments that would indicate prospects for democratisation in the longer term. Only Tunisia managed to preserve relative internal stability and peace, and to make a successful transition to democracy, adopting a constitution that enshrines democratic principles and human rights, and conducting free elections. Although all the other Arab countries affected by the Arab Spring remain undemocratic or authoritarian,

⁵ "Abdelaziz Bouteflika: Algerian leader resigns amid protests," BBC, 3 April 2019.

the region today contains a mix of nations some of which are friendly towards NATO, the EU and their member states (Israel is, for example, a key ally of the US), others which are ready to cooperate with them (Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan, and – to an extent – Egypt) and some that are rather reluctant to do so (Lebanon).

Israel is, of course, a key regional player, including on the Palestinian issue, the Syrian civil war (on which it keeps a very low official profile), southern Lebanon, and the denuclearisation of Iran. It participates in NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) alongside Arab nations but prefers strong bilateral political and defence relations with certain NATO Allies, most notably the US. Its relations with some Arab countries (Bahrain, UAE and Sudan, and perhaps Saudi Arabia) are warming up.⁶

Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan are generally stable and do not present security threats or challenges (although there is a stand-off between Morocco and Spain because of illegal migration through the exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla).⁷ Lebanon is in a deep political, economic and financial (as well as healthcare) crisis and although it has accepted NATO support (e.g., after the explosions in Beirut on 4 August 2020), remains sceptical about cooperation with the Alliance.⁸

1.2. THE WARS IN SYRIA AND LIBYA

The bloody civil wars in Syria and Libya have evolved over the years into proxy wars,

The bloody civil wars in Syria and Libya have evolved over the years into proxy wars, in which Russia, Turkey, and other actors are engaged

⁶ Deb Riechmann and Matthew Lee, "Trump: Sudan to join UAE, Bahrain in recognizing Israel," AP News, 23 October 2020.

⁷ "Ceuta, Melilla in Economic Crisis in Face of Moroccan Economic Border Restrictions," Morocco World News, 24 January 2020.

⁸ Ben Hubbard, "Lebanon's Economic Crisis Explodes Threatening Decades of Prosperity," The New York Times, 12 May 2020; NATO, "Dutch search and rescue team deploys to Lebanon, facilitated by NATO strategic airlift," 10 August 2020.

in which Russia, Turkey, and other actors including terrorist organisations, armed militias and foreign mercenaries, are engaged. Syria is now effectively divided into three areas of occupation or protection: one controlled by Al-Assad's regime with Russian and Iranian military support (most of the country's central, southern, and western areas); one by Turkey (a 'safe zone' along its border with Syria, and the Idlib province); and one by the Kurdish population with American and other Western support (the north-eastern regions).

The fighting in Syria has been less intense following the devastating conquest of Aleppo by the Syrian army with Russian support (2016), the defeat of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) by the Western coalition (early 2019) and attempts by al-Assad's forces to conquer Idlib (2019). The current political and military status quo will likely persist, as there are no real prospects for unifying the country, finding a lasting political solution, or deploying international peacekeeping forces, which would entail, for example, the complete and parallel pull out of Russian, Iranian, Turkish and Western forces, and the liquidation of the regime's remaining stocks of chemical weapons.⁹

Libya, abandoned by the West after dictator Muammar Gaddafi was ousted and killed, has seen almost uninterrupted turmoil and civil or proxy war since 2011.¹⁰ National reconciliation and unity has not been possible and the Libyan National Army headed by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar supports a rebel government and parliament in Tobruk, which struggles against the country's internationally recognised government in Tripoli.¹¹ Haftar, a US citizen who studied in the late 1970s at Frunze Military Academy in Moscow, relies heavily on Russian military and financial support. His 2019 threat to take Tripoli, supported by Russian mercenaries of the Wagner Group and Russian air assets, prompted Turkey to deploy military

aid and its own forces to support the legitimate government.¹²

Fighting in Libya continues, but as in Syria, the stalemate that has emerged stands in the way of negotiations to end the war, reunite the Libyan nation, and free the country of foreign military forces. NATO has offered Libya some carrots in the form of "appropriate" assistance in coordination with the UN and the EU, and possible participation in the Mediterranean Dialogue.¹³ But the situation on the ground, which will likely not improve without decisive Western action and long-term engagement, makes any form of cooperation unrealistic.

The situation on the ground will likely not improve without decisive Western action and long-term engagement

1.3. THE SAHEL

The Sahel, North Africa's soft belly, is a vast region stretching from Mauritania to Sudan and the Horn of Africa. The enormous Sahara Desert separates densely inhabited areas in the Sahel from populated areas on the Mediterranean coast and offers avenues for the largely unrestricted movement of terrorists, armed militias, and human and other smugglers. The countries of the Sahel region are plagued by poverty and insecurity, weak state institutions and civic societies, corruption, and low levels of education. They attract terrorist networks, such as the remnants and affiliates of ISIS and al-Qaeda and are highly dependent on international economic and humanitarian aid, and security assistance.¹⁴

While NATO is not present in the Sahel or engaged in dialogue with the countries of the region (except Mauritania), individual Allies are actively engaged in international efforts, centred on Mali, which hosts operations and missions conducted by the UN (the

⁹ United Nations, "Time to Press for Lasting Political Solution in Syria, Easing Its People's Suffering amid COVID-19 Pandemic, Special Envoy Tells Security Council," press release, 18 September 2020.

¹⁰ Yasmina Khadra "How the west broke Libya and returned it to the hatred of the past," The Guardian, 22 October 2015.

¹¹ Borzou Daragahi, "Khalifa Haftar: Libya warlord's march on Tripoli unites rivals against him," The Independent, 8 April 2019.

¹² "UN to meet on Libya as Turkey deploys troops to back Tripoli gov't," Al Jazeera, 6 January 2020.

¹³ NATO, "Brussels Summit Declaration. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 11-12 July 2018," press release (2018) 074, 11 July 2018, para 58.

¹⁴ For an overview see: Kalev Stoicescu, *Stabilising the Sahel. The Role of International Military Operations* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2020).

Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)) and the EU (EU Training Mission (EUTM)) and those led by France (Operation *Barkhane*, including Task Force *Takuba*). Estonia deploys land and special forces in Mali in support of the French operation and contributes to MINUSMA and the EUTM. These contributions are significant relative to the size of Estonia's armed forces, and important politically as Estonia is France's only Ally to deploy land forces in Mali.

Other EU and NATO allies provide air and logistical support, notably, the US, UK, Denmark, Germany, and Spain. American presence is very important, especially for reconnaissance and strategic air lift assets, but the US has indicated that it may leave the region. The African Union is also engaged, as is a joint force of the G5 Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger).

2. NATO IN THE REGION

Of the nine EU and NATO allies located on the northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, France, Italy, Turkey, and Spain have the strongest militaries, possessing large naval and air forces that are particularly relevant in the maritime environment of the Mediterranean. The Greek armed forces are significant too, but are mostly focused on the perceived threat from Turkey.

The US also has a powerful naval presence in the Mediterranean. The Sixth Fleet, headquartered at Naval Support Activity Naples, includes 10 ships, 130 aircraft and 9 000 personnel.¹⁵ The fleet operates mainly from the ports of Rota in Spain, Gaeta, La Maddalena and Naples in Italy, and Souda (NATO's Naval Support Activity) in Crete/Greece. There is also a US Naval Air Station at Sigonella in Sicily, Italy. In addition, the US uses large military facilities in Turkey. The Incirlik air force base houses 5 000 US personnel, fighter and transport aircraft and other squadrons, and at least 50 B61 tactical nuclear bombs. American forces also use the Izmir air force base and the Kurecik

radar station.¹⁶ The US has several military facilities in Italy, including Army bases near Vicenza (the location of an Airborne Brigade Combat Team) and in Tirrenia (Camp Darby), and a large air force base in Aviano.¹⁷

The UK has a naval presence centred on the British Overseas Territory of Gibraltar and the UK Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dekhelia in Cyprus, home to a signal unit and an RAF squadron. Another 40 sites on the island are used by the UK for military purposes.¹⁸

NATO's most powerful member states, except for Germany and Poland, thus have key force elements, including nuclear, in the Mediterranean region. Together, these dwarf the capabilities of other foreign forces, including Russia and, apart from Israel, local forces. However, the combined strength of the Alliance in the region is undermined by several serious disputes between Allies.

The centuries' old feud between Greece and Turkey, including the issue of Cyprus following the 1974 Turkish invasion and occupation of the northern part of the island, erupted again in the summer of 2020, this time threatening military confrontation over rights to gas reserves and maritime rights in the eastern Mediterranean.¹⁹ Turkey and Greece agreed in early October to negotiate in the framework of a "bilateral military de-confliction mechanism"

The combined strength of the Alliance in the region is undermined by several serious disputes between Allies

proposed by NATO's Secretary General.²⁰ But there are also tensions between the two countries connected to Syrian refugees struggling to reach Greek islands close to Turkey's western coast, and over President

¹⁵ Mark D. Faram, "Why the US Navy has 10 ships, 130 aircraft and 9,000 personnel in the Mediterranean," Navy Times, 24 April 2019.

¹⁶ Joseph Trevithick, "USAF Is Spending Millions To Upgrade Turkey Bases Amid Turkish Threats To Kick Them Out," The Drive, 24 December 2019.

¹⁷ "US Military Bases in Italy," Military Bases.com

¹⁸ J. Vitor Tossini, "The UK in Cyprus –The Importance of the Sovereign Bases in Akrotiri and Dekhelia," UK Defence Journal, 16 June 2018.

¹⁹ "Turkey-Greece tensions escalate over Turkish Med drilling plans," BBC News, 25 August 2020.

²⁰ NATO, "Military de-confliction mechanism between Greece and Turkey established at NATO," 1 October 2020.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's July 2020 decision to turn Hagia Sophia, the iconic museum in Istanbul, a historic symbol of Orthodox Christianity and a UNESCO World Heritage site, into a mosque.²¹

Meanwhile, France and Turkey have been increasingly at odds over Syria and Libya. France has a strong historic affiliation with Syria and the relations between the two countries were very warm until the Syrian civil war started in 2011.²² France has been extremely irritated by what it sees as Turkey's unilateral actions in Syria. In Libya, Turkey supports the government in Tripoli recognised by the UN, including with military means. While France claims that it does not support rebel Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, it nevertheless accuses Turkey of "hostile acts", "unacceptable behaviour" and breaching the United Nations arms embargo on Libya.²³

The US is also in dispute with Turkey, strongly criticising its decision to buy S-400 missile defence systems from Russia. These are designed against Allied aircraft and missiles and cannot be included in NATO's integrated air and missile defence system, while their purchase from an adversary's defence company presents

its territory.²⁵ A compromise may see the US buying the S-400 systems from Turkey, in particular if Turkey's position softens due to an agreement that US forces will withdraw from northern Syria, along Turkey's border.²⁶

Disputes related to issues to NATO's south may also impact the interests of Allies that are not directly involved, as illustrated by Turkey's blockage of the defence plan for Poland and the Baltic states while other Allies declined to recognise certain Syrian and Turkish Kurdish groups as terrorist organisations.²⁷

The Alliance must also be ready to react promptly to crises to preserve peace and stability and protect the Allies' economic and trade interests

2.1. COLLECTIVE DEFENCE AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

While NATO's posture in the Mediterranean is undoubtedly sufficient to deter any potential adversary, the Alliance must also be ready to react promptly to crises to preserve peace and stability and protect the Allies' economic and trade interests. It has conducted operations and regular collective defence and crisis management exercises of various size and scope in the Mediterranean Sea since the Cold War era.

For example, NATO conducts an annual anti-submarine warfare exercise, *Dynamic Manta*, part of its efforts to monitor and be prepared to act against foreign naval surface and submarine presence.²⁸ *Sea Guardian*, meanwhile, is an ongoing NATO naval operation, established in 2016 and aimed at deterring terrorism and cross-border illegal activities.²⁹ One notable non-routine act of NATO

Disputes related to issues to NATO's south may also impact the interests of Allies that are not directly involved

a major political problem. In July 2019, shortly after the S-400 systems were delivered, the US removed Turkey from the F-35 joint strike fighter programme.²⁴ It also threatened Turkey with economic sanctions; Turkey promised to retaliate by closing US military bases on

²¹ "Explained: The situation at Greece's borders," Amnesty International, 5 March 2020; "Hagia Sophia: Turkey turns iconic Istanbul museum into mosque," BBC News, 10 July 2020.

²² France held a mandate for Syria (and Lebanon) from the League of Nations from 1923 to 1939 and continued to occupy Syria under the Vichy regime until the country's independence in 1946. The Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, "War in Syria: Understanding France's position," June 2020.

²³ "France accuses Turkey of hostile acts to stop enforcement of Libya arms embargo," Reuters, 17 June 2020.

²⁴ Aarom Mehta, "Turkey officially kicked out of F-35 program, costing US half a billion dollars," Defence News, 17 July 2019.

²⁵ Chase Winter, "Turkey's Erdogan threatens to close strategic bases to US military," DW, 15 December 2019.

²⁶ Joe Gould, "US could buy Turkey's Russian-made S-400 under Senate proposal," Defence News, 29 June 2020; Carlotta Gall, "U.S. and Turkey Avoid Conflict by Agreeing on Buffer Zone in Syria," The New York Times, 7 August 2019.

²⁷ Robin Emmott and John Irish, "Turkey still blocking defence plan for Poland, Baltics, NATO envoy says," Reuters, 17 June 2020.

²⁸ "NATO begins Dynamic Manta submarine drills in Mediterranean Sea," The Defence Post, 27 February 2019.

²⁹ "NATO Operation Sea Guardian Focused Patrols Sail The Eastern Mediterranean," Naval News, 26 November 2020.

solidarity was the deployment by Germany and the Netherlands of Patriot air defence missile systems, following consultations under Article 4 of the Washington Treaty, to Turkey's border zone with Syria in 2013, to protect Turkey against missile attack.³⁰

NATO presence in the region also includes the Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2) which, in addition to its core task of providing a rapid reaction capability, conducts similar tasks to *Sea Guardian* in the Mediterranean and Black Seas.³¹ It was deployed to the Aegean Sea in 2016 to support Greece, Turkey and the EU border agency Frontex at the height of the Syrian refugee and migrant crisis to conduct surveillance, monitoring and reconnaissance in the territorial waters of Turkey and Greece, and in international waters. It demonstrates Allied solidarity, and provides significant practical support to local authorities.³²

In 1999, NATO also established the Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group 2 (SNMCMG2), consisting of 2 or 3 minehunters and auxiliary vessels, subordinated to the Allied Maritime Command and part of the NATO Response Force (NRF). SNMG2 was deployed to the Aegean Sea as the first action of the Projecting Stability agenda agreed at the 2016 Warsaw Summit.

2.2. COOPERATIVE SECURITY

2.2.1. THE MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE

The North Atlantic Council initiated the MD in 1994. The MD, which currently includes Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia, aims to dispel misconceptions about NATO among participants and to achieve better mutual understanding.³³ It was an important part of the Alliance's post-Cold War adaptation, demonstrating that security in Europe is closely linked to stability in the Mediterranean. It is mostly bilateral in structure (NATO+1) and

operates at different levels, from ambassadors to ministers and chiefs of defence. Its practical components include participation in military exercises, training courses and other academic activities in NATO's colleges and schools, and mutual visits.

Notably, the MD does not include war-torn Libya and Syria, or Lebanon, which remains a difficult and sceptical partner (the memory of the 1983 Beirut barracks bombings, which killed 241 US and 58 French military personnel, persists, and Hezbollah, established in the aftermath of the bombings, influences Lebanese politics). Of the G5 Sahel group, only Mauritania participates.

The MD is regularly praised in NATO declarations, including at the level of heads of state and government. Speaking at its 25th anniversary in 2019, for example, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg concluded that it "has helped to boost trust and cooperation between members."³⁴ However, the political interest the MD countries show in

The political interest the MD countries show in NATO goes hand-in-hand with a cooler approach to the Alliance in their public discourse

NATO goes hand-in-hand with a cooler approach to the Alliance in their public discourse. This situation is likely to continue while the practical priorities of the MD countries – including counterterrorism and counterinsurgency training (and equipment and funding), intelligence sharing, border control, cyber security, and civil protection – go unaddressed.³⁵

2.2.2. CAPACITY BUILDING

NATO's efforts to build situational awareness and understand regional challenges and threats are centred on its Hub for the South, located in Naples. The hub collects and shares information, and coordinates NATO's

³⁰ "Germany deploys Patriot missile defense to Turkey", DW, 8 January 2013.

³¹ Megan Eckstein, "NATO's Mediterranean Maritime Group Mission More Than Tracking Russian Subs," USNI News, 3 March 2020.

³² NATO, "NATO's Deployment in the Aegean Sea," fact sheet, October 2016.

³³ NATO, "NATO Mediterranean Dialogue," 13 February 2015.

³⁴ NATO, "NATO marks 25th anniversary of Mediterranean Dialogue," 6 May 2019.

³⁵ Ian Lesser, Charlotte Brandsma, Laura Basagni and Bruno Lété, *The Future of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue* (Washington DC: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, June 2018), 1-2.

activities in the south, including reaching out to partners.³⁶ At their 2018 Brussels Summit, NATO leaders agreed:

to complete, including through the full capability of the Regional Hub for the South, the additional work required to implement all elements of [their] Framework for the South, namely the ability to anticipate and respond to crises emanating from the south, improved capabilities for expeditionary operations, and enhancing NATO's ability to project stability through regional partnerships and capacity building efforts.³⁷

The Hub suffers from NATO's overall lack of strategy towards and definition of the South

However, the Hub suffers from NATO's overall lack of strategy towards and definition of the South. As one analyst observes, the Hub for the South was created:

out of the Nations' desire to show that NATO was "doing something" about the South without fully analysing what needed to be done or what is

meant by the "South" (...) what began as a tool to cope with the impact of uncontrolled migration on European security, has morphed into something bigger and less focused – and ultimately less likely to deliver on its ambitious mandate.³⁸

These capacity building efforts with selected and willing partners would include advance planning, and exercises with scenarios reflecting the strategic environment in the south. The Allies also adopted a 'Package on the South' that aims to strengthen NATO's deterrence and defence, contribute to international crisis management in the region, and help partners build resilience and improve their capabilities to fight terrorism.³⁹

In practice, NATO's defence capacity building programmes are oriented more towards Middle East countries, in particular Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait, rather than North Africa (although Tunisia is an exception).

ESTONIA'S CONTRIBUTION IN THE SOUTH

The Estonian Ministry of Defence plans to deploy up to 175 military personnel to international operations in 2021. The plans foresee the deployment to Baghdad of a force protection unit (a platoon of 40 personnel, comprising volunteers from Estonia's Defence League) as a contribution to the NATO training mission in Iraq. Denmark, which will be the lead country in the training mission, had requested additional forces from the Baltic states. In addition, Estonia plans to continue to participate in the US-led Operation *Inherent Resolve*, also in Iraq, with 10 (possibly augmented) Estonian Defence Force personnel.

Estonia will continue to participate with an infantry platoon and a Special Forces taskforce in the French led Operation *Barkhane* and Task Force *Takuba*, in Mali. Estonian staff officers will be also rotated through the UN peacekeeping operation, MINUSMA, and the EU's training mission in Mali (EUTM).

46 personnel will be deployed to the NATO-led *Resolute Support* training and advisory mission, which provides support to the Afghan security forces in their fight against terrorism.

Estonia also intends to deploy staff officer(s) to Bahrain to take part in the US-led Operation *Sentinel*, which defends freedom of navigation in the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Other minor contributions include Estonia's participation with staff officers or observers in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (Lebanon), and the EU's naval operation EUNAVFOR Med *Irini*.

Taken together, Estonia thus makes a considerable contribution, compared to the size of its defence forces, to international operations led by NATO, UN, EU, France and the US throughout the wider MENA region and the Sahel – in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bahrain (to be confirmed by the host country), Lebanon, the Mediterranean Sea and Mali. Estonia has also previously participated with units in EU operations in the Central African Republic (EUFOR CAR) and the Indian Ocean/Horn of Africa (*Atalanta*), and NATO and UN operations in former Yugoslavia (KFOR, SFOR, UNPROFOR) and Lebanon (UNIFIL).

³⁶ NATO, "The Southern Hub. NATO Strategic Direction South."

³⁷ NATO, "Brussels Summit Declaration," para 27.

³⁸ Stephen J. Mariano, "NATO's strategic redirection to the South", NATO Defence College NDC Policy Brief No. 12 (June 2020), 4.

³⁹ NATO, "Brussels Summit Declaration," para 55.

2.3. THE NORTH-EASTERN FLANK ALLIES

While Allies from the north-east flank regard the direct impact of threats from the south as low, they are nonetheless motivated to take an active role in addressing these issues to demonstrate and build solidarity with those Allies for whom they are more pressing. They also support an Alliance presence in the south to prevent Russia and China, whose own presence is increasing in the region, from either attempting to undermine stability or exploiting power vacuums.⁴⁰

Thus, in addition to platoon-sized contributions to NATO's Operation *Resolute Support* in Afghanistan, Latvia and Lithuania also have a small presence in EUTM Mali and MINUSMA, and Lithuania additionally in the EU Training Mission in the Central African Republic (EUTM RCA); while Poland contributes to *Resolute Support*, *Inherent Resolve* (Iraq), EUTM RCA and the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁴¹

However, according to the interviews conducted with officials and experts in support of this policy paper, which included questions on Estonia's contribution to the southern agenda (see box), views on northern contributions from southern Allied countries may be mixed. Some noted that the Baltic states are wise to show political interest and a willingness to contribute to protecting NATO's south, with Estonia's participation in operations in Mali, particularly in the French Operation *Barkhane*, an outstanding contribution to international operations and missions in these regions. Others suggested that Estonia's contributions, and those of other Baltic and Nordic countries, are not visible, and that Estonia and other Baltic Allies are primarily preoccupied with the challenges posed by Russia in their vicinity. Nor are they active in debates regarding the southern flank.

⁴⁰ Michał Baranowski, Linas Kojala, Toms Rostoks and Kalev Stoicescu, ed. Tony Lawrence, *What Next for NATO? Views from the North-East Flank on Alliance Adaptation* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2020), 6.

⁴¹ *The Military Balance* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2020), 122, 124, 136.

3. OTHER STATE ACTORS

3.1. RUSSIA

The Allies agree that Russia's aggressive actions, mostly apparent to NATO's east, present a clear threat to Euro-Atlantic security.⁴² For political, military and economic reasons, Russia also uses every opportunity to play a more prominent and visible role in the Mediterranean region and to strengthen its military footprint in order to gain

For political, military and economic reasons, Russia also uses every opportunity to play a more prominent and visible role in the Mediterranean region

greater access and freedom of movement and action.⁴³ According to the Montreux Convention of 1936, the Black Sea Fleet has unimpeded access to the Mediterranean Sea through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles straits.⁴⁴ Vessels of Russia's Northern Fleet also occasionally visit the Mediterranean. Russia has a strong foothold in Syria, including a naval base in Tartus, and an air base in Khmeimim, but has few other options to use ports and air bases in the region for military purposes. Montenegro's accession to NATO, which Moscow tried to derail by attempting to assassinate the country's former Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic, prevented Russia from potentially gaining access to a naval support base in the Adriatic Sea and a sea-land connection to Serbia.

The success Russia claims in Syria is, though, incomplete

Russia became involved militarily in Syria in September 2015, after Russian-Western relations had been sharply damaged by Russia's aggression against Ukraine.⁴⁵ Its involvement

⁴² NATO, "London Declaration. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London 3-4 December 2019," press release (2019) 115, 4 December 2019, para 3.

⁴³ Colin P. Clarke, William Courtney, Bradley Martin and Bruce McClintock, "Russia is Eyeing the Mediterranean. The U.S. and NATO Must Be Prepared," The Rand Blog, 30 June 2020.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Turkey), "Note on the Turkish Straits."

⁴⁵ Gabriela Baczyńska, Tom Perry, Laila Bassam and Phil Stewart, "Exclusive: Russian forces join combat in Syria – sources," Reuters, 10 September 2015.

has included the deployment of mercenaries from the Wagner group, a military company trained and equipped by the G(R)U.⁴⁶ Russia reaps multiple benefits from this, including international recognition and leverage to bring Moscow back to the negotiating table, influence over Turkey and opportunities to sow discord in NATO, and a testing and training ground for its military personnel and equipment. The success Russia claims in Syria is, though, incomplete. Turkey has created its own back yard (the 'safety zone' and the rebel region of Idlib) while Russia struggles to penetrate Syria's gas and oil rich Deir ez-Zor province, controlled by the Kurds and US forces, in spite of dramatic and costly defeats such as the neutralisation of a large Wagner Group contingent in February 2018.⁴⁷

More recently, Russia also inserted itself into in the Libyan civil war

More recently, Russia also inserted itself into in the Libyan civil war, siding with the rebel Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, and waging a proxy war against the Turkish-backed Tripoli government. It has used attack aircraft, deployed from Russia through Syria, in the fighting around Tripoli.⁴⁸ Russia's official joint-stock company, Goznak, even printed 1.1 billion US dollars' worth of Libyan counterfeit currency, intended for Haftar's forces, but confiscated by the Maltese government in March 2020.⁴⁹

3.2. CHINA

NATO's first reference to a possible role in dealing with a rising China was made at its 2019 London Summit: "We recognise that China's growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance."⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Department of Defense (US), "[Russia, Wagner Group Continue Military Involvement in Libya](#)," 24 July 2020.

⁴⁷ Madeleine Carlisle, "[Trump Keeps Talking About Syria's Oil Fields. Here's What's Going On With Them](#)," Time, 26 October 2019; Piotr Zochowski, Krzysztof Strachota and Marek Menkiszak, "[Russian losses near Deir ez-Zor – a problem for the Kremlin](#)," OSW, 21 February 2018.

⁴⁸ Eric Schmitt, "[Russia Attack Jets Back Mercenaries Fighting in Libya](#)," The New York Times, 11 September 2020.

⁴⁹ Department of State (US), "[Seizure by Malta of USD 1.1 Billion of Counterfeit Libyan Currency](#)," press statement, 29 March 2020.

⁵⁰ NATO, "London Declaration," para 6.

China is a newcomer to the Mediterranean. Its visibility in the region is not high, but its presence to the south of Europe, particularly economic, and to some extent military, will likely grow.

China's closest permanent military presence is in the Horn of Africa, where the naval support base of the People's Liberation Army in Djibouti, China's first overseas military facility, opened in August 2017.⁵¹ Its official role is to provide logistic support to the Chinese military vessels that participate in anti-piracy, peacekeeping and humanitarian missions off the coasts of Somalia and Yemen, but it also has the potential to be useful for Chinese power projection in the Mediterranean Sea.

Chinese navy ships have on several occasions entered the eastern Mediterranean via the Suez Canal to participate in joint drills with Russia in the vicinity of Syria.⁵² Russia has been keen to offer its own logistic support, from Tartus, and to demonstrate a close relationship between the two countries, but China clearly has its own agenda and ambitions. Beijing does not raise red flags, but infiltrates politically, economically, and militarily while trying to avoid conflicts and provocations. It has an ambition to be the world's leader by 2050, when it envisages achieving military parity with the US, if not superiority.⁵³ Its military presence in the Mediterranean Sea will thus likely increase, perhaps also including a base facility on the southern shore.

Beijing does not raise red flags, but infiltrates politically, economically, and militarily while trying to avoid conflicts and provocations

Given its commercial traffic and political significance, the Mediterranean region is also regarded by China as a priority for its Belt and Road Initiative.⁵⁴ It continues to acquire ports

⁵¹ "[China formally opens first overseas military base in Djibouti](#)," Reuters, 1 August 2017.

⁵² Li Jing, "[Chinese and Russian navy ships conduct first joint drills in Mediterranean](#)," South China Morning Post, 11 May 2015.

⁵³ Adam Ni, "[China Wants the Most Powerful Military on the Planet by 2050. And They Might Pull It Off](#)," The National Interest, 7 March 2018.

⁵⁴ Peter Roell, "[China's Interests and Challenges in the Mediterranean](#)," Institut für Strategie-, Politik-, Sicherheits- und Wirtschaftsberatung Strategy Series 578, September

and facilities, and to build infrastructure on all shores of the Mediterranean, from Spain to Turkey, Cyprus, and Israel. The interests in the Chinese market of large German exporting companies could allow China to achieve better deals with the EU and open opportunities to fulfil its economic interests in the Mediterranean region.⁵⁵

Finally, Russia (and to a lesser extent, China) is interested in military-technical cooperation in MENA countries that feel threatened by internal and external actors, thereby increasing political influence.⁵⁶ This is a challenge for NATO, especially if countries such as Algeria, Egypt and Libya were to fall under the influence of, or prefer assistance from Russia or China.

4. TOWARDS A SOUTHERN STRATEGY

4.1. THREATS AND RISKS

Consideration of the security environment suggests that the West should take coordinated action to counter the interrelated risks from Europe's southern rim associated with terrorism, migration, the potential spill over of instability and conflict, and the growing presence of Russia and, to a lesser extent, China. In some, but by no means all cases, NATO will be the most appropriate organisation through which to act. Western states are,

An effective Western response will also require Allies to resolve their differences over how best to tackle these risks

of course, already active in many of these areas, including through the Alliance, but not in a systematic manner. An effective Western response will also require Allies to resolve their differences over how best to tackle these risks. The militant Islamist group ISIS emerged in 2013 and was able to conquer significant

territories and populations. It was ultimately defeated by a US-led Western coalition in Iraq and Syria, but terrorism is far from being eradicated in MENA (as far as Afghanistan), as well as Sub-Sahara/Sahel.⁵⁷ Attacks in Europe by Islamist terrorists, both radicalised locals and those recently arrived from MENA, are a serious concern, particularly in countries like France.⁵⁸ Eradicating terrorism in MENA and the Sahel will be a challenging task that cannot be accomplished soon. The large resources that will be necessary to uphold international

Eradicating terrorism in MENA and the Sahel will be a challenging task that cannot be accomplished soon

efforts, the fatigue of contributing nations, and the spread of COVID-19 are among the factors that work in the terrorists' favour. The Sahel countries are especially unequipped to deal with terrorists operating from their territories. Leaving them on their own will exacerbate the security situation, perhaps leading to the Talibanisation of some countries, creating far greater problems for North African nations and – by extension – European Allies.

Instability in MENA has also led to Europe being hit by massive waves of migrants and refugees, particularly since 2015, causing domestic political problems and animosities between European states.⁵⁹ Such waves of irregular and massive migration could recur if the conflicts in Syria and Libya are not resolved, or if the economic and security situation in the MENA or Sahel regions deteriorates. More broadly, instability in MENA and Sahel countries and potential spillover from Syria, Libya or the more troubled areas of the Sahel, is a serious concern to southern Allies, and might lead to an obligation for larger Western intervention.

Russia's military posture in the Mediterranean region is rather limited. It does not present a

2018.

⁵⁵ Jakob Hanke Vela, Giorgio Leali and Barbara Moens, "Germany's drive for EU-China deal draws criticism from other EU countries," Politico, 1 January 2021.

⁵⁶ Alexandra Kuimova, "Russia's Arms Exports to the MENA region: Trends and Drivers," EuroMesco, 1 April 2019.

⁵⁷ Campbell MacDiarmid and Willy Lowry, "From the Ashes of ISIS," The National, 2019.

⁵⁸ Norimitsu Onishi, Constant Méheut and Layli Foroudi, "Attacks in France Point to a Threat Beyond Extremist Networks," The New York Times, 6 November 2020.

⁵⁹ Jon Henley, "EU migration crisis: what are the key issues?" The Guardian, 27 June 2018.

direct threat to NATO in the south and there appears to be no evidence of misconduct by Russian naval ships or military aircraft comparable to the serious and repeated incidents that have occurred in the Black and Baltic Seas. Nevertheless, Russia's potential to create and exploit trouble should not be underestimated, and the Kremlin certainly does not wish to risk losing crucial leverage for meddling in regional affairs in MENA and playing an important role in relation to Western powers. China's presence in the Mediterranean region is only emerging, but the longer-term risks of Chinese competition here should not be ignored.

Russia's potential to create and exploit trouble should not be underestimated

Finally, unsettled disputes and conflicts of interests between Allies concerning Mediterranean issues are obstacles to be overcome if the Alliance is to agree and implement a new comprehensive strategy for its south.

4.2. VIEWS FROM THE REGION

Southern Allies, including Romania and Bulgaria, rightly expect NATO to take threats and challenges from the south as seriously as they do those from the east. NATO cohesion and solidarity depends to a substantial extent on the ability of the Allies to work out and begin implementing a comprehensive strategy and plans for the south that include concrete aims, joint actions, and resources. In general, the northern Allies are motivated to contribute, but it is the Mediterranean Allies who have the understanding and expertise necessary to define what these aims, actions, and resources in the regions they border should be.

The material that follows explores the possible content of a NATO southern agenda, as seen from the perspectives of southern Allies. It is based on non-attributable interviews with government officials and security policy experts from Spain, Italy, Greece, Romania, and Turkey, conducted in the summer and autumn of 2020. Their opinions do not necessarily reflect or coincide with official positions.

4.2.1. SPAIN

Spain's main security concerns are the increase of instability in MENA countries and its potential spill over to the Euro-Atlantic area. The fragility of some of the MENA states, and the increasing strength of terrorist and criminal networks there, are root causes of instability. Because of this, Europe suffers from a high number of terrorist attacks. Growing instability also has a heavy impact on trends in migration towards Europe from or through MENA countries. The security situation has been worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic. Terrorist groups have seen public and state efforts focused on fighting the pandemic and taken the opportunity to revisit their strategies and to recruit. These collateral effects will be seen for many years in the future.

At the same time, Russia's political and military role in the Mediterranean, particularly in Syria and Libya, is increasing, including through permanent access to naval and air bases. The Kremlin's objective is to become a regional Mediterranean player.

NATO, the EU, the UN, and the African Union play key roles in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, and in defence capacity building and security sector reform in MENA countries. NATO has a solid and mature relationship with its MENA and Gulf partners, who are willing to strengthen further this relationship in areas such as counter-terrorism, cyber defence, border security, countering hybrid threats, Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear security, and maritime security. There is both scope and need for further cooperation.

A thorough debate on appropriate goals and resources for the south is still needed

The southern agenda has not traditionally been a focus of NATO. Although this trend has changed in the last few years, a thorough debate on appropriate goals and resources is still needed.

4.2.2. ITALY

Italian interviewees argued that NATO is not doing enough to enhance cooperation or to

mitigate regional security challenges. It is in the Alliance's interest to assist MENA countries to improve their capabilities to fight terrorism and human trafficking, and to improve their cyber defence capabilities. Although the Alliance is contemplating the MD and its goals in the south, individual approaches, diverging views and conflicts of interest stand in the way of agreement, and there is little motivation for cohesion among Allies. There is much unpredictability and ambiguity, and the main actors play their own games.

China and Russia will be increasingly active in the region, and NATO must consider strengthening its posture too, a strong NATO deterrence and defence posture in the south would also send a robust message to non-state actors that their attacks will not go unpunished – the Allies will retaliate. Russia is opportunistic, seeking advantages and visibility and taking all the space it can occupy. China's strategy is very different. It does not want to be confrontational, but to be perceived non-aggressive, driven only by economic and commercial goals.

A strong NATO deterrence and defence posture in the south would also send a robust message to non-state actors that their attacks will not go unpunished

Italy strongly supports NATO's comprehensive 360-degree approach. Seeing the security of Allies as indivisible, it takes the Russian threat seriously and contributes to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence, NRF and other frameworks.

4.2.3. GREECE

For Greek interviewees, the main security concerns for the region are terrorism, illegal migration, the conflicts in Libya and Syria, and Turkey's revisionist and destabilising policy. The crises in Syria and Libya have greatly increased instability in Greece's neighbourhood and have exacerbated international tensions through the involvement of foreign powers with conflicting interests. They have also cast doubt on the ability of international institutions to resolve political problems.

Turkey's adoption of a neo-Ottoman agenda based on aggression and revisionism has made it a source of grave concern for the security and stability of the entire south-eastern Mediterranean. Its promotion of its own interests is exemplified by the decades-long Cyprus problem, Ankara's attitude towards allied Greece, which includes a disregard of international law and threats of war, its exacerbating of division and undermining of any prospects for peaceful coexistence through its role in Syria, Libya and Iraq, its sacrifice of NATO unity for the sake of its own calculations, and its manipulation of migration flows.

The NATO 2030 process is a great opportunity to reflect upon the new security environment and how the Alliance can respond to it

The NATO 2030 process is a great opportunity to reflect upon the new security environment and how the Alliance can respond to it, but more importantly to overcome varying interpretations and priorities among Allies. The Hub for the South of NATO (Strategic Direction South) has increased awareness of the security situation and broadened channels of communication with other international organisations active on the southern periphery. Allies should also allocate more force contributions to activities in the Aegean Sea and the broader Mediterranean.

Greece believes that NATO also has a crucial role to play by increasing synergies with its southern partners, boosting their defence capabilities, and offering training, expertise, and measures to improve interoperability. The EU has an equally important role, not only through military means like the *Irini* mission off the coast of Libya, but also by providing financial assistance and promoting political dialogue to stabilise these countries and their societies and to offer new political perspectives to their leaderships.

Russia's presence on NATO's southern flank has grown significantly in recent years, along with an increased military footprint. Moscow has built considerable political and diplomatic activity related to the crises in Syria and Libya. Faced with this reality, NATO's dual track approach of

deterrence and dialogue could also contribute to stabilising the south, reducing the risk of misunderstandings and unintended escalation, and increasing the chances of finding political solutions to these crises.

4.2.4. ROMANIA

For Romania, the European and transatlantic security environment is extremely complex, characterised by long-term strategic competition, pervasive instability and threats stemming from both the east and south. Russia will remain a significant challenge for NATO in the foreseeable future, including its assertive stance in Romania's immediate vicinity. Crimea has become a critical element in Russia's ability to pursue its strategic and geopolitical goals in the Black Sea, Caspian Sea and Mediterranean Sea, which it sees as a continuum through which it can freely move its military forces as needed. Conventional and hybrid challenges overlap in the Black Sea region, where in the last 12 years Russia has used military force twice in violation of international law and national sovereignty, compounding the instability and volatility stemming from existing protracted conflicts in Georgia (Abkhazia, South Ossetia) and Moldova (Transnistria).

Crimea has become a critical element in Russia's ability to pursue its strategic and geopolitical goals in the Black Sea, Caspian Sea and Mediterranean Sea

Fighting these challenges, and terrorism from the south, will require a coherent long-term approach and close coordination among international actors. NATO needs to continue to strengthen deterrence and defence, while increasing its contribution to projecting stability in close cooperation with like-minded partners. NATO, the EU, and the US should support enhancing resilience, defence capacity, democratic reform, energy independence and economic development in eastern and southern partners.

4.2.5. TURKEY

Turkey is a frontline country, situated in a region where challenges from the east and south intersect. Failed states, such as Syria, and those with weak governance, such as in Iraq, allow terrorist groups to flourish and offer a base from which to stage attacks against Turkey. The fight against terrorism, in particular against groups such as Daesh (Islamic State), Al Qaeda, PKK and its offshoot in Syria (PYD/YPG),

Cooperation between some Allies and PYD/YPG terrorists constitutes a threat to Turkey's national security

is thus a priority. Cooperation between some Allies and PYD/YPG terrorists constitutes a threat to Turkey's national security, aggravates the challenges resulting from terrorism, and threatens unity and solidarity among Allies.

These sources of instability trigger irregular migration towards Europe, and Turkey is a first responder to this challenge. It hosts the largest number of refugees worldwide (about 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees along with close to 400 000 persons from other nationalities) and has long been a bulwark against irregular migration, shouldering the economic and social burden of this challenge.

Turkey is also concerned by attempts by foreign terrorist fighters to use it as a transit country. Other sources of serious concern include fragility in the Balkans, security challenges emanating from North Africa, the stalemate in the Middle East peace process, the ongoing disagreement on the island of Cyprus, the increased challenge

Turkey's situation is a microcosm of that of the entire Euro-Atlantic region

to Turkey's legitimate and lawful claims on its maritime Exclusive Economic Zone, and the brewing tensions between the US and Iran that risk spilling over into the wider region.

Turkey's situation is a microcosm of that of the entire Euro-Atlantic region. Many of Turkey's

challenges affect the whole Alliance, but the unity and cohesion of the Allies in dealing with threats from the south have not been as palpable as they have against challenges from the east. The failure to form a common position on unfolding events in Syria and Libya, for example, left Turkey with no other option than to respond with its own means and capabilities. A lack of decisive leadership on both sides of the Atlantic prevents NATO from addressing challenges in an effective manner, while differing perceptions among Allies and the consequent reluctance to act will continue to provide Russia and terrorist organisations with room to exploit the situation for their own interests. There is thus no realistic prospect for improving the security situation in the foreseeable future.

Russia has exploited the power vacuum in Syria and Libya to flank the Alliance and Europe from the south

The EU's effectiveness in responding to these problems and its willingness to cooperate with NATO and non-EU European partners is also questionable. The EU's missions in Iraq (EUAM) and the Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR Med *Irin*) are mostly detached from broader international efforts. The EU has been reluctant to engage Turkey in its efforts as a non-EU Ally and a partner, as a candidate for full membership, and as a country that plays a critical role in enhancing security and stability in Europe.

Meanwhile, Russia has exploited the power vacuum in Syria and Libya to flank the Alliance and Europe from the south. Russia's focus is on the land domain in both the Black Sea and in the Mediterranean regions. It uses the maritime and air domains mostly to ensure logistical supplies to its military and hybrid campaigns, in particular in Crimea, Syria and Libya. The Allies do little to limit Russia's activities in the Mediterranean Sea due to their respect for international law and the relatively non-assertive nature of Russia's activities.

Russia also engages North African countries, such as Egypt and Algeria, to enhance its influence in the region. In the current circumstances, it probably considers that its interests would be best met by protracting the

conflicts it is involved in, especially in Syria and Libya, rather than resolving them.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To its south and southeast (the Mediterranean basin, and the MENA and Sahel countries) NATO faces multiple external threats associated with terrorism, migration, the potential spill over of instability and conflict, and the growing presence of Russia and, to a lesser extent, China. While NATO is not the lead organisation to address many of these threats, it has a possible role to play in mitigating all of them. But differing views among the Allies as to what the Allies and NATO should do have also produced internal challenges for the Alliance.

Allies in the Mediterranean region rightly expect NATO to take threats and challenges from the south as seriously as they do those from the east. NATO needs to work out and to implement a comprehensive strategy and plans for the south that include concrete aims, joint actions, and resources. Alliance cohesion and solidarity depends to a substantial extent on the ability of the Allies to do this. The north-eastern flank Allies are ready to play their part, but it is the Mediterranean Allies who have the understanding and expertise necessary to define the content of a strategy for the regions they border.

NATO should:

- Step up efforts, in the context of the probable drafting of a new Strategic Concept in 2021, to define – and resource – a clear, comprehensive, and coherent strategy for addressing threats and challenges from its southern rim. The southern Allies should take a prominent role in this process. Such a strategy should aim to, at least:
 - Enhance situational awareness in the Mediterranean region, including by defining better the role of and providing appropriate resources for the Hub for the South.
 - Continue to provide sufficient Allied military presence in the region to ensure freedom of movement, sustain deterrence and permit rapid crisis

response. It is essential that the US should be included in this presence.

- Enhance practical activities conducted in the framework of the Mediterranean Dialogue and use all NATO's available resources (including the expertise of its centres of excellence) to provide meaningful support to MENA and G5 Sahel countries in areas such as defence capacity building, resilience building, counterterrorism and counterinsurgency training, intelligence sharing, border control, cyber security, and civil protection.
- Improve coordination with other agencies active in MENA and Sahel, such as the EU, UN and African Union, in order to ensure a coherent international approach. This should include both political engagement and routine joint activities.
- Engage more the countries in the Sahel, including through the Mediterranean Dialogue, and offer practical support to international efforts in the region. The significance of the Sahel to security in

MENA should not be underestimated, but rather reflected in NATO's southern approach.

- Enhance mechanisms and habits of internal political consultation with a view to avoiding disputes between Allies on Mediterranean region issues; and continue to support, and as necessary expand, its bilateral military de-confliction mechanism to resolve current disputes.

Moreover, the north-eastern flank Allies should:

- Emphasise their support for NATO's 360-degree approach, and for NATO's role in addressing threats and challenges from the south.
- Provide appropriate contributions, including military forces, to NATO and Western activities in the MENA and Sahel regions.
- Do more to ensure that their present levels of contribution are visible to other Allies.

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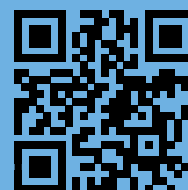
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ISSN 2228-2068